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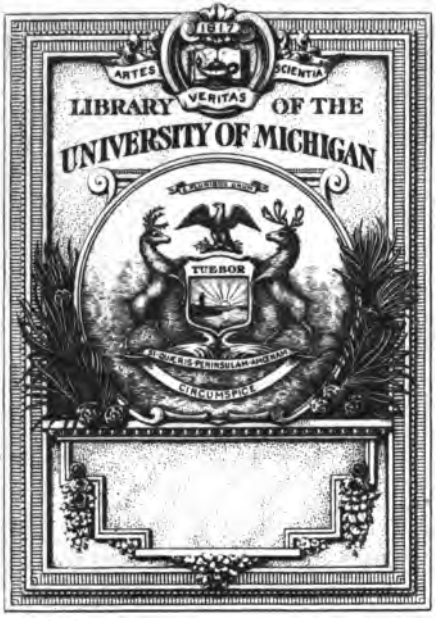


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# TWO LECTURES ON THEISM

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# TWO LECTURES ON THEISM

DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

BY

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# TWO LECTURES ON THEISM

## I

THERE are three terms, not perhaps very clearly defined, — perhaps not employed by different writers with any strict uniformity of usage, — still, terms which may suffice to indicate at the outset the possible lines in which theories of the divine may move. The terms I mean are Pantheism, Deism, and Theism. There is a certain differentiation between them, even in current usage. Pantheism either identifies God with the world of men and things, or, in the emphasis it lays upon the divine as the only reality, reduces the facts of finite existence to a mere show or appearance. Pantheism in its varied forms moves between these two extremes; but the feature common to both is the denial of a distinction between God and the world. In the one case, God is explicitly equated with the world-process, so that there can be no talk of difference; in the other case, we are taught that the difference is only a difference that seems.

Over against pantheism, in either of its phases, stands the view which I have called Deism. Deism lays so much stress on the difference, or, as it is here technically called, the transcendence, of the divine existence, that it removes God out of the world altogether, and sets him at a distance alike from the play of nature's laws and the thoughts and actions of mankind, — a spirit beyond the stars, a being who created the world once upon a time, who may interfere at times with the machinery, but who contents himself on the whole with "seeing it go." This view, though repudiated by religious feeling and by the more profound theological thinkers, is embedded in a great deal of popular theology and popular religion. And in more prosaic ages of thought it is sure to predominate, to the exclusion or neglect of the truth for which pantheism contends. The deistic God, an *Être suprême* or Great First Cause, is the kind of God whose existence the so-called "proofs of the existence of God" are intended to establish. People even speak in this connection of proving the existence of *a* God, — a phrase which obviously implies that they think of God as an individual among other individuals, and therefore as a *finite* being *within* the universe in the widest sense of that

term. This is of course seen to be impossible, as soon as speculation rouses itself. Monotheism, conceived in this deistic fashion, is a survival of polytheistic belief, — a higher development, no doubt, but not different in kind.

There is a certain amount of authority for the use of the term Theism to indicate a view which endeavors — whether it succeeds or not is another question, but which at least endeavors — to recognize both immanence and transcendence, and so to do justice to the truths which underlie the one-sided extremes of pantheism and deism. The elements which must be combined in a theistic doctrine which shall satisfy both the head and the heart — both the speculative and the practical reason — can only be appreciated after some consideration of the contrasted extremes which it endeavors to mediate between, or, as the phrase runs, to combine in a higher unity.

The contrasts exhibit themselves to some extent on the stage of history, when we look at the course of modern philosophy. All historical generalizations of this kind require modification, when we look into the detailed history of the time; they are in the main simply suggestive points of view, and I am far from desiring to press unduly the view of the course of modern

speculation which I am about to propound, in face of the exceptions which any one so inclined might produce against it. Still, it is not uncommon in the best histories of philosophy to regard the seventeenth century as an age of universalism, followed in the eighteenth century by a swing of the pendulum to the opposite extreme of individualism. Universalism, in this philosophic use of the term, implies a tendency to pantheism. Individualism means, in its first stage, deism, — an individually separate first cause, as the originator of the finite individualities whose reality demands explanation. The difficulties which deism encounters in its search for such a God lead on this line of thought towards an atheistic culmination. The astronomer sweeps the heavens with his telescope and finds no God; reason finds it impossible to stop anywhere in the infinite regress of finite or phenomenal causes. The proposal to prove by the scientific law of causality the existence of an *uncaused* being seems, indeed, little better than a contradiction in terms. Hence the deistic God is at last discarded as a hypothesis which is not required.

Something like this development really took place in modern thought, if we look only at

its main currents. Seventeenth-century thought may be said, without injustice, to culminate in the great pantheistic system of Spinoza. This was what the Cartesian era issued in. And that this speculative strain is by no means to be attributed solely to the exceptional individuality of Spinoza, as a man and a thinker, is conclusively shown by the development of the same tendency independently by Malebranche, a Christian priest. Malebranche refers to Spinoza with virtuous indignation as a *misérable*, just as Locke, the individualist and deist, disclaims all kindred with his "justly decried" name, or as Hume, the individualistic sceptic, refers, with less excuse, to "that famous atheist" and his "hideous hypothesis" (Treatise, Bk. I. Part 4). Malebranche's system differs from Spinoza's, no doubt, in some not unessential points, where his Christian consciousness makes itself felt; and his *intention* is unquestionably theistic. But, in the main determinations of their systems, the Father of the Oratory and the excommunicated Jew coincide so closely that it is plain both are upborne by a common stream of tendency in the thought of the time.

Locke and Leibnitz were the minds who chiefly shaped the thought of the eighteenth century.

The activity of both carries us back some distance into the seventeenth, just as the shaping forces of the nineteenth begin to show themselves a good many years before 1800. Leibnitz's system is a rehabilitation of the rights of the individual life against the all-devouring pantheism of Spinoza. Leibnitz himself was too profoundly speculative a mind to find the last word of philosophy in a doctrine of bare Pluralism, that is, to accept a number of individual reals as absolutely self-subsistent and mutually independent. He endeavored to embrace them within the unity and harmony of a single system; and, in thus rendering justice to the truth which the universalistic systems emphasize, went so far sometimes in his expressions as to lay himself open to the imputation of Spinozism at the hands of his own degenerate successors, the prosaic and shallow philosophers of the *Aufklärung*, or Enlightenment. For it was the fate of the Leibnitzian philosophy, as it was developed in Germany, to be gradually stripped of its profounder elements. In being adapted for popular consumption, it was reduced to a cold and formal rationalism, in which the relation of God to the world became more and more external.

On the other hand, in England and in France, Locke's "Essay," with its somewhat prosaic common-sense and narrow horizons, was the philosophical Bible of the century. To Locke himself an extra-mundane deity was a matter of demonstrative certainty, on the strength of the law of causation. Such demonstrations were frequent during the century; but Coleridge complains, not without reason, that men had come to regard God's relation to the world in much the same light as that of a mason to his work. A Demiurge or world-builder was, in fact, all that such an argument could at best succeed in proving; and as the stable mechanical conditions of the universe were more clearly realized, and also the incongruity became more apparent of passing *along the line of phenomenal causation* to a non-phenomenal first cause, this mechanical deism easily gave place to atheism. But deism was the first development. The first fruit of Locke's "Essay" in England was the historically important movement known as English deism, with its so-called "religion of nature." It was against this form of thought that Butler directed his "Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion." But, as was seen in the well-known case of James Mill, this *argumentum ad hominem*, in-

tended to drive a deist back upon Christianity, was a double-edged weapon, and might just as logically lead a less convinced deist to abandon his deism for an atheistic or completely sceptical position. This free-thinking English deism was transplanted to France by Voltaire, whose religion, if any man's, was based upon the pure understanding. Voltaire was as strenuous an opponent of atheism as he was of Christianity. But the drift of empirical philosophy towards a materialistic atheism went on apace during his lifetime among the circle of the encyclopædists, of whom Diderot is the greatest name. The views of this circle were given to the world in 1770 in the Baron d'Holbach's once famous "Système de la Nature."

This book in the first flush of its reputation, and with all the adventitious charms of a suppressed work, fell into the hands of the youthful Goethe at Strassburg. He tells us in his autobiography the impression which it made upon him and his friends. "We did not understand how such a book could be dangerous. It seemed to us so gray, so cimmerian, so deathlike, that we had difficulty in enduring its presence; we shuddered at it as at a spectre. Not one of us had read the book through, for we

found the expectations disappointed with which we had opened it. 'System of Nature' was the announcement, and we hoped in consequence really to learn something of nature, our idol. But how hollow and empty we felt in this melancholy atheistic half-darkness (Halbnacht), in which the earth with all her forms, the heaven with all its constellations, vanished. Matter was said to exist from eternity, and to be in motion from eternity; and through this motion — to right and to left and in all directions — it was said to produce, without more ado, the infinite phenomena of existence. We might even have put up with this, if the author had really built up the world before our eyes out of his matter in motion. But apparently he knew as little about nature as we did; for after laying down some general notions, he leaves them at once, in order to transform all that appears higher than nature, or as a higher nature in nature, into a nature that is material, ponderable, in motion, it is true, but without direction or form. And he believes that he has thereby gained a wonderful deal." This was the meeting of the old and the new. The highest wisdom of the declining century — or what gave itself out as such — appeared as

foolishness — "the quintessence of senility" are Goethe's own words — to the pulsing life of the youth who was so largely to shape the thoughts of the coming time.

In England empiricism developed into scepticism in Hume, while the orthodox theology, which had at first looked askance at Locke, became more and more impregnated with the principles of the deism it had officially to combat. And the century eventually finds its typical theological representative in Paley, whose almighty watchmaker is as true to Locke's conception of deity as his definition of virtue, as "the doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God and for the sake of everlasting happiness," reproduces Locke's account of "the true ground of morality, which can only be the will and law of a God who sees men in the dark, has in his hands rewards and punishments, and power enough to call to account the proudest offender." Thus an interested or purely selfish morality — a heteronomous morality, in the Kantian phrase, — is the natural outcome of a theory which makes God a merely external creator and lawgiver. And it is significant that when Goethe sought refuge with Spinoza from the godless mechanism of eighteenth-century materialism, what

especially attracted him was the *disinterestedness* which breathes in every line of the "Ethics," even to the culminating sentence which Goethe quotes, "He that truly loves God must not desire that God should love him in return." That is almost certainly not the whole truth either, but at least it throws into glaring relief the meanness of Paley's view, and the insufficiency of the theory of which it forms an integral part.

It was by a natural instinct that men turned in revulsion from the cramping influences of the current theology, whether orthodox or free-thinking, to the great misapprehended Jewish thinker. For nigh upon a hundred years people had talked about Spinoza, says Lessing, as if he were a dead dog. A rationalistic opponent, not content with the ordinary weapons of controversy, prefixed to his efforts a portrait of Spinoza with the inscription, "Signum reprobationis in vultu gerens." And, as Goethe humorously adds, the engraving was so shockingly bad that there was no denying the allegation. The casual allusions of Locke and Hume, already quoted, are fair specimens of the way in which Spinoza is usually referred to all through the age of individualism. Lessing, that great and intrepid pioneer of nineteenth-century thought and literature, was among the first to

break the spell. Jacobi, though diametrically opposed to Spinoza's method and result, contributed by his publications to enhance his philosophical importance in the eyes of the rising generation. Goethe has put on record, in more than one place, the deep impression which the "Ethics" made upon him. The influence of Spinoza was decisive upon the great German idealists who developed the philosophy of Kant, more especially upon Schelling and Hegel. Emphasize their minor differences from him as they may, he is yet to them the greatest figure in modern philosophy. Instead of his atheism Hegel talks of his Akosmism, just as Novalis speaks of him as a God-intoxicated man. Through these and other post-Kantian systems, the universalistic strain became once more dominant in modern philosophy, while through Schleiermacher the same influence made itself powerfully felt in theology. Schleiermacher's eloquent apostrophe is well known, in which he calls upon all true men to "offer, as in the ancient fashion, a lock of hair to the manes of the holy and excommunicated Spinoza. The sublime spirit of the universe penetrated him; the infinite was his beginning and his end, the universal his only and eternal love."

And far beyond the limits of the schools, whether philosophical or theological, the same movement of man's mind is observable at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In England it was the expansive power of the poetic imagination that shattered the world of the prosaic understanding, and communicated to literature that sense "of something far more deeply interfused," which Wordsworth, its noblest exponent, celebrates in his famous "Lines composed above Tintern Abbey," —

> "a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things."

Wordsworth and Coleridge had had their conversations about Spinoza and the new German philosophy on the ferny slopes of the Quantocks and by the shores of the Severn-sea; but to Wordsworth this insight into the unity and kinship of all that is, flowed directly, without the need of such intermediary, from "the spirit of religious love in which he walked with Nature." Coleridge, we know, claimed to have reached in-

dependently at an earlier date the same results as Schelling; and all his life long he contemplated a book on the Logos, which was, in his own words, to unite Spinozism and the mechanical deism in "the theism of Saint Paul and Christianity."[1] Shelley's aërial flight carries him towards pantheism pure and simple, rising at times to an enthusiastic worship of the Spirit of Beauty in all that lives, and again passing into that pantheism of illusion which may verge closely upon pessimism.

"The one remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until death tramples it to fragments. — Die,
If thou would'st be with that which thou dost seek."

But, with whatever varieties in accent, all these poetic voices give utterance to the essential truth that the divine is not to be sought as a problematical Spirit beyond the stars. God is revealed to us alike in the face of nature and in our own self-conscious life, — in the common reason which binds mankind together and in the ideals which light us on our upward path. God is not far from any one of us. Within us and around us, here or nowhere, God is to be found. This truth

[1] Biographia Literaria, chapter 12.

may be said to have remained a permanent possession of the present century. Nobly emphasized by Carlyle and Emerson, it has gradually leavened that slow-moving mass of popular thinking which generally lags so painfully behind the best insight of its own time. For the enlightenment of one century lives on, as dogma and prejudice, to impede the higher thought of the next. Carlyle's running polemic against what he calls "the mechanical system of thought," and the grim irony with which he assails the notion of "*proof* of a God," — "a *probable* God," — furnish some of his strongest passages, while the chapter of "Sartor" in which he outlines the counter-doctrine of "Natural Supernaturalism" is one of the most moving pieces of English prose.

But it is time to return from this general survey of modern thought to the more strictly philosophical discussion of the subject. And in doing so, we shall find our natural starting-point in the philosophy of Kant, from which all the lines of modern speculation may be said to radiate. The great German idealists, I said, were under the decisive influence of Spinoza; and they are sometimes treated as if they had simply revived his pantheism, and grafted it upon the Critical phi-

losophy of Kant. That, however, would be a superficial view. The history of philosophy shows no such resurrection of the body of a philosophical system, though the spirit of it may live again in another age. So the dominant universalism of Spinoza's thought lived again in Schelling and Hegel; but the body it took to itself was developed under other auspices and in another intellectual atmosphere. It was as much the natural outgrowth of Kantianism, as Spinozism was the natural outgrowth of Cartesianism. And in Hegel's philosophy, at all events, the new universalism certainly aims at correcting the defects of the old, — and not only aims at doing so, but in important points succeeds. While subscribing unreservedly, as every speculative mind must, to Spinoza's fundamental proposition, "Quicquid est in Deo est," and accepting therefore his doctrine of immanent causality, Hegel differentiates his own system from Spinoza's, in that he defines the Absolute not as Substance, but as Subject. He endeavors, that is, to conceive the universe as the process of a self-conscious life, and not as the determination of a substance that in itself is bare of all determinations, and possesses, therefore, no creative *nisus* (so to speak), which might explain its self-determination into the manifold

forms of the finite world. Hegel escapes in this way, too, the negative logic of Spinoza, which, by finding true reality in the perfectly undetermined, reduces all the distinctions of finite existence to a species of illusion. The process of history and of human life is to Hegel eminently real. That at least is his prevailing attitude of mind.

How, then, did this new universalism spring from the philosophy of Kant? Kant's philosophy has many sides, and one strain of Kantian thought has contributed much to the strength of agnosticism in the present century. The subjectivity and agnosticism which cling to Kant's doctrine of knowledge must, however, in fairness be regarded as incidental to the way in which he reached his main results, not as themselves constituting his permanently valuable contribution to modern thinking. On the intellectual side, that contribution undoubtedly consists in his doctrine of the categories, — in the demonstration, to put it generally, of a system of rational conceptions which are involved in every self-conscious act of mind, which enter, therefore, into the construction of every object we know. They are the conditions of the very possibility of experience as such, and may be regarded, therefore, as the irreducible essence of the rational

world. Kant himself did not give a complete list or an exhaustive account of these conceptions, nor can he be said to have, in all cases, treated satisfactorily their relation to one another and to the supreme unity of self-consciousness whose forms they are. But he named the most important, and bequeathed to his successors the fruitful idea of an organized system — an organism — of reason.

Kant himself regarded the categories as merely subjective, as a necessary equipment of *human* understanding if we are to have experience at all, but still merely a subjective mould, as it were, into which we run the fluid and formless material of sensation, — something, in short, contributed by the subject in the act of knowledge, and therefore of essentially limited validity, not predicable of reality as such. But such *mere* subjectivity is, in the very nature of the case, impossible to prove. Even if our categories were purely subjective, it is impossible we should ever come to know it; and the idea of a world of things in themselves, apart from the world we know, may easily be shown to dissolve in contradictions. A world, real and independent of the individual's transient acts of knowledge, is not a world divorced from intelligence altogether.

The fact, therefore, that a category lives subjectively in the act of the knowing mind is no proof that the category does not at the same time truly express the nature of the reality known. It would be so only if we suppose the knowing subject to stand outside of the real universe altogether, and to come to inspect it from afar with mental spectacles of a foreign make. In that case, no doubt, the forms of his thought might be a distorting medium. But the case only requires to be stated plainly for its inherent absurdity to be seen. The knower is in the world which he comes to know, and the forms of his thought, so far from being an alien growth or an imported product, are themselves a function of the whole. As a French writer[1] puts it, "consciousness, so far from being outside reality, is the immediate presence of reality to itself and the inward unrolling of its riches." When this is once grasped, the idea of thought as a kind of necessary evil — Kant really treats it as such — ceases to have even a superficial plausibility. Unless we consider existence a bad joke, we have no option save tacitly to presuppose the harmony of the subjective function with the nature of the universe from which it springs.

[1] M. Fouillée, in his "L'Évolutionnisme des Idées-forces."

The subjectivity of Kant's treatment of the categories was, however, incidental to the scheme, and was immediately abandoned by his idealistic successors. It is the point against which Hegel brings some of his heaviest artillery to bear. His criticism of Kant in this respect is absolutely conclusive. "Thoughts," as he says, "do not stand between us and things, shutting us off from the things; they rather shut us together with them." In Hegel's hands, therefore, the analysis of the structure of thought is, in his own daring phrase, "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence, before the creation of nature or a single human spirit." Or, to put it perhaps less alarmingly, nature may be viewed, in its formal essence, as a system of objective thought, — a fossilized intelligence, according to the phrase which Hegel repeats from Schelling. The finite mind elicits these thoughts in the process of experience, and in doing so may fitly be said to rethink the thoughts of the creative reason. But the finite mind is itself an effluence or reproduction of that reason. Thought therefore shuts us together with things because it is the common essence both of the subject and the object; and it is their common essence only because it expresses, on the intellectual side, the

nature of God himself, the ultimate fact within which nature and man are both somehow contained. Hence the central position assigned to logic in the Hegelian scheme; for logic investigates the abstract types, the conceptions, of which we find the real exemplifications in nature and history. So that Hegel says sometimes that the other philosophic sciences, the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Mind, may be regarded as, so to speak, an applied logic. Reason, or thought, is not an accident of man; it is the presence in him of the universal world-reason, the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. In virtue of its presence in all men, interchange of thought becomes possible, and, with that, the growth of society and all the history of civilization, all these things being based upon a common system or organism of reason. And, in like manner, the fabric of external nature becomes transparent and intelligible to the mind, seeing that it reveals itself as the embodiment of the same conceptions. "We recognize in nature's inner heart only our own reason and feel ourselves at home there. Spirit has the certainty which Adam had when he saw Eve. 'This is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.'" Thought is thus the great unifier;

it is that which welds God and Nature and Man together as members of one whole. To know reason, therefore, is to know God; the presence of reason within us is the presence of God; the progressive rationalization of the world by science is a continuous extension of our knowledge of God, — a cumulative theistic proof, if it is right to talk of proof in a case where necessary assumption might better express the real state of affairs.

But this purely intellectual account of the divine, as a system of thoughts or conceptions, is obviously not in itself a sufficient doctrine of God. It requires to be supplemented from the ethical side. And here again we must take our start from Kant, who is the modern ethicist *par excellence*, who has in fact founded upon ethics his whole positive teaching. The ethical theology in which Kant's system culminates is, to my mind, by far the most important contribution of modern philosophy towards a vital theism. And this remains true, although we may be just as little able to accept Kant's doctrine here in the precise form in which he clothed it, as we were able to accept his theory of the categories as subjective forms of the human mind. Although he opened the way for the whole course

of nineteenth-century thought, Kant remained himself in many particulars a man of the eighteenth, and in his ethics we have to disengage the theory from its eighteenth-century vestments.

Kant goes to work in the ethical sphere in much the same way as in the intellectual; he sets out by asking what is the condition, or what are the conditions, of the possibility of ethical experience at all. The fundamental condition, he discovers, is the unconditional "thou shalt" of Duty, — what he calls the categorical imperative. Here his position is impregnable; there is no passage from "is" to "ought." Whatever scheme of ethics we follow, whatever standard we adopt as the touchstone of the rightness of an action, — say we are utilitarians, for example, or even enlightened hedonists, — the ultimate judgment which enjoins the realization of that standard must contain an unconditional and irreducible "ought." If we are to have ethics at all, then, as a system of precepts, we must rest somewhere upon a categorical imperative. Having established this point, Kant proceeds to ask what more this "ought" involves. First of all, "ought" involves "can." It is essentially absurd to address a command to a being who has no power to conform to it. The ethical "ought"

applies not to the inanimate things of nature, which act according to laws of which they themselves know nothing; it applies only to beings who have the capacity of acting according to the idea of a law, that is, who have the power of determining themselves according to the idea of an end, — beings who have a will, who are free. Moral freedom is therefore the first implication or postulate of the ethical life. And to it Kant adds, in a somewhat forced and artificial fashion, the two other postulates of God and immortality. Immortality is postulated because the conflict between the law of duty and the lower self of inclination cannot be brought to a victorious conclusion within the present life, or indeed within any finite period of time. The perfect will which morality demands is a flying goal, "which fades for ever and for ever as we move." An infinite progress of approximation is all that the finite being can realize, and for that infinite progress an infinite time is demanded. In other words, the ethical being is necessarily immortal.

The postulate of the divine existence suffers most from the way in which it is introduced. Kant had resolutely discarded all considerations of happiness from his ethical imperative and his idea of the virtuous man. Duty is to be done

for duty's sake alone; otherwise the act has no ethical value whatever. But though the moral man must take no account of happiness in his actions, it would still contradict our sense of righteousness and justice if there were to be a fundamental divorce between virtue and happiness, or even a total want of any correlation between them. Correlation of some sort is a demand which the ethical consciousness makes of the universal scheme of things. This is a postulate of morality, in the sense that without it morality would not be fully intelligible; without it morality would have no root in the nature of things. The appearance of morality would be an unexplained intrusion in a cosmos which took no account of it one way or another. The man who was moral in such circumstances could be so only in a spirit of stoical despair or defiant revolt. If morality is to be fully justified, we must believe that in morality we have the universe somehow behind us. But the system of natural causes in the midst of which our present life is lived, shows no inevitable adjustment of happiness to virtue. The wicked flourish like a green bay-tree. "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the

unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not."

> "Streams will not curb their pride
> The just man not to entomb,
> Nor lightnings go aside
> To give his virtues room;
> Nor is that wind less rough that blows a good man's barge."

But there is no need to enlarge upon a discrepancy which has furnished moralists with a theme since history's dawn. Kant's argument based upon it is that if the present sensible world offers no guarantee of such adjustment, the adjustment must be made in the interests of morality hereafter by a moral governor of the universe, to whom the sensible world is only part of a wider scheme of things.

However important the truth it embodies, it is obvious that Kant's statement here is painfully bald and mechanical. He first separates what he has no right to separate, and then brings what he has separated externally together again. God is not here directly connected with the substance of the moral law; he is not represented as the source of the ideal which it sets up within us. He is simply, as it were, the official of the law, the instrument for

carrying out the demands which the ethical consciousness makes. The law of duty is self-imposed, according to the fundamental tenet of the Kantian ethics. It is true, Kant afterwards enjoins us, in his philosophy of religion, to obey the law as the law of God. But there is no direct and inevitable connection between the two positions; for God, as we see here, is treated by Kant in the most extreme deistic fashion, as a being entirely apart from the self of the individual. It is not, however, as an external lawgiver that God is the source of the ethical law or ideal. Against that view, Kant rightly insists on the necessity that the law shall be self-imposed, if it is to carry with it an authority against which there is no appeal. He does not fully see, however, that if its imposition is referred to the self of the isolated individual, we are thrown back into subjectivity, and are quite as much at a loss as before to account for the authority of the law, the consciousness of absolute obligation which accompanies it, — an obligation not only for me, but for all rational beings. This authority, claimed and exercised by the higher self, is only intelligible if the ideals of that self are recognized as the immediate presence within us of a spirit leading us into all truth and goodness.

The moral law is not first imposed by the individual self (in the theory of ethics), and then ratified or re-imposed by an external lawgiver (in the theory of religion). Rather the two are one from the beginning. God is the source and author of the law, but only in the sense that he is the higher self within the self which inwardly illuminates all our lives.

Instead of connecting God in this direct way with the substance of morality, Kant gives him an external and instrumental relation to it. But, if it is not right to treat a human being merely as a means, it must surely be a false way of putting things to present God in this merely instrumental light. The undignified nature of the position is enhanced, when it is seen that he is treated simply as a means to the happiness of the individual, — a *deus ex machina*, introduced to effect the equation of virtue and happiness. This is, even from the point of view of morality itself, an unfortunate way of stating the postulate in question. The puritanic preacher of duty for duty's sake lapses curiously, we might almost say, into the hedonistic morality of the eighteenth century, which he elsewhere so strenuously condemns. For, after all, it is not happiness in any banal sense that the ethical

consciousness claims as the wages of well-doing. It sets up no demand that all its acts of self-restraint or self-sacrifice shall be recompensed by doles of happiness, — as if, says Spinoza, men expected to be decorated by God with high rewards for their virtue and their best actions, as for having endured the direst slavery. What the ethical consciousness does demand is rather, as I have put it, to feel the universe behind it, to know that we are living in a moral cosmos, where our efforts avail somewhat, and where virtue may have the wages of going on and not to die.

It will be observed also in how baldly individualistic a spirit the moral order is here conceived by Kant. I am far from being satisfied with a universalism which sacrifices the individual to the progress of the race. As I have ventured to put it on another occasion, "even if the enormous spiral of human history is destined to wind itself to a point which may be called achievement, what of the generations that perished by the way? 'These all died, not having received the promises.' What if there *are* no promises to *them?*" If there are not, this optimism of progress seems to me as tragic at heart as any pessimism. I agree with Kant that the immortality of the individual is necessary, if we

are to have a solution that can really call itself optimistic, a solution that we can really embrace as satisfying in the largest sense. But there is no reason why the recognition of this should make us ignore the solidarity of the race, and treat the individuals in sheer isolation, as Kant seems here to do. If we can recognize a moral purpose in history, as the education of mankind as a whole, that gives our entire ethical conception a greater grandeur of outline without impairing our convictions as to the destiny of the individual.

But the severance of the individual from the life of the race is due to Kant's initial separation between the individual self and the inspiring presence of the divine life. And it is finally to be noted that, just because Kant makes an absolute separation of this kind, the imperative of duty becomes for him an empty form without any ethical content. It is an unconditional command, but it commands nothing in particular, because it has no organic connection with the material of moral duty, as that has been evolved in the course of history by the moral experiences of mankind. The applicability of the imperative to any particular course of action becomes a matter of abstract and somewhat round-about demonstration. This is the formalism of Kant's ethical theory

which almost all his critics have condemned, and which is, in many ways, the counterpart of the subjectivity of his doctrine of reason.

The advance of Kant's successors, particularly of Hegel, was to connect the ethical as well as the intellectual experience of man directly with the divine life, and by so doing to root Kant's abstract individual in the historic life of humanity. In other words, they universalized the ethical as they had done the intellectual theory. The progress of man upwards from 'the ape and tiger' to the civilization of the present day, with its altruistic and humanitarian ideals, — this whole ethical process, with the customs and institutions in which it embodies itself, its laws, its public opinion, its shifting but ever deepening and widening ideals of honor and chivalry, of heroism or saintly life, of justice and self-control, — all this development can be rightly understood only when regarded as the progressive unfolding from within of an ideal of goodness, which in itself is the most real of realities. The ideal is not communicated to all men in the same form, or to the earlier ages with the same fulness as to the later; for it is the nature of morality to be a progress, — a progress won by effort. Character is not born, but made; it takes shape under the

pressure of temptation and difficulty. The advance of historical study has long lifted us above the notion of an abstract conscience promulgating to all men the same perfect moral law. The content of the moral law grows in every way from age to age. An age is not furnished with more light than it needs to solve its own problems; revelations are not made till the fulness of time has come, that is, till the hearts and minds of men are prepared by their previous training to understand and appreciate the new truth. If it were otherwise, the revelation would pass uncomprehended over the heads of the generation to which it was addressed. It would be as unprofitable as the gift of prophesying in an unknown tongue. So natural is this process of divine education that it seems as if the new insight were wrested by man himself from the void and formless infinite, — as if the new truth, the new ideal, were the creation of his own spirit. And he then bows down and worships himself as a god in a godless world. These, however, are but the two sides of the shield which may be opposed to one another to all eternity. All moral and religious truth *is* won by the race for itself, in the sweat of its own moral experience, but not without the indwelling spirit of God.

## II

We considered in the preceding lecture the contributions of Kant and Hegel toward a theistic position, and we found that these contributions were of the most fundamental importance. The idea of the world as a system of reason, and the idea of it as a moral order, are surely the most essential constituents of an adequate conception of God. But we have still to ask whether this contribution constitutes in itself an adequate account of the Divine Being. Does this philosophy — does Hegel in particular — carry us beyond this conception (so far abstract and impersonal) of a system of reason and a moral order? Beyond doubt, many who have called themselves Hegelians have believed that their master's system was not only consistent with theism, but was neither more nor less than the philosophical expression of the deepest Christian doctrine of God. It is certainly possible, therefore, to interpret the system in this sense; but it may be that this interpretation relies to a considerable extent on the beliefs which the interpreters bring with them to the study of their author. The Hegelian system itself, if interpreted with

logical consistency, and according to its dominant spirit, scarcely seems to carry us to such conclusions; and by the most brilliant followers of the master they have been explicitly denied.

The strength of Hegel's philosophy lies, as we have seen, in his insistence on the doctrine of immanence, — the immanence of divine reason in the world. The polemical emphasis of the system is directed against the agnostic relativism of the Kantian Critique with its doctrine of the thing-in-itself, and against the easy mysticism of Schelling's Philosophy of Identity. Our knowledge does not banter us with shows and phantasms; it is a knowledge of reality, its result is truth. In ultimate terms, it is describable as a revelation of the nature of God. God, therefore, is not an Unknowable, nor is he, as Schelling said, a Neutrum, — a pure identity in which there are no distinctions, and of which, therefore, we can make no predications. But, in reaction against this error, Hegel's gift of forcible statement led him into expressions which seem to imply a no less questionable extreme. In preaching the truth that the Absolute is revealed in the world of its appearances, not craftily concealed behind them, Hegel seems to pass to a sheer identification of the two. But while it is true that the two aspects must be

everywhere combined, — an absolute which does not appear or reveal itself, and an appearance without something which appears being correlative abstractions, — that is not tantamount to saying that the appearance of the absolute to itself, — the divine life as lived by God himself, — is identical with the appearance which the world presents to the Hegelian philosopher.

Hegel does tend, however, in many of his statements, to put the philosopher in the place of deity, and literally to identify the history of humanity with the development of the Absolute. But, surely, although we may reasonably hold that the evolution of mankind, and the fashioning, by the manifold experiences of time, of spirits fitted to take their place in one great spiritual commonwealth cannot be a mere show or appearance for an eternally complete Deity; though religious feeling compels us to think that the long discipline of our mortal life, its joys and sorrows, its sins and struggles and infinite aspirations, cannot be indifferent to God himself, as if it were merely a pageant that passed before him, but must rather be conceived as a process in which he bears a guiding part, a process whose results are truly an enrichment of his own life, — although all this may, or shall we say, must be true, yet surely

we cannot so identify God with the process of human history as to say that we have in the history of philosophy, for example, the successive stages by which God arrived at a knowledge of himself, complete knowledge being dated from the publication of Hegel's works in the beginning of the present century. What we really have is the history of man's repeated attempts to solve the problem of the universe, — a history which, even from this point of view, we may not unreasonably expect to show marks of progress and increasing insight; though, as I ventured to say on another occasion, even at the end, if we are honest with ourselves, the insight is so dim that the title of absolute knowledge applied to it has the sound of Mephistophelian mockery.

It is, if possible, even more plainly so in the case of religion. What is religion, if not an attitude of the subjective spirit of man? We are here altogether on human ground. And the same is true of art and of history itself, — the history of civilization, of States and empires. Is it not effrontery to narrow down the Spirit of the universe to a series of events upon this planet? Can we believe, as Lotze puts it, "that the creative cause of the universe issued from its darkness into the light of manifestation only by the narrow path of earthly

nature, and after having formed man and human life retreated again into infinity, as if with all its ends accomplished? For this dialectical idyll we must substitute an outlook into the boundlessness of other worlds, not with the vain effort to know the unknowable, but with the view of letting the boundlessness of this background mark out the narrow limits of the realm of existence actually knowable by us."[1] And when, in the realm of action and political history, Hegel formulates the characteristic thesis of an absolute philosophy, "The real is the rational," or tells us that the State is the divine Idea as it exists on earth, does not the optimistic verdict sound again like hard-hearted mockery, when we turn our eyes upon the miserable inadequacies, the cruel wrongs, the festering sores of civilization even at its best? Certainly the State may be said to be of divine institution, inasmuch as it is a schoolmaster to lead us into the ethical life of self-surrender, mutual respect, and mutual service, making us feel ourselves members one of another; and teaching us, if need be, to lay down our lives for our native land. In all these things, we do well to regard the fabric of society and the State as the instrument of a divine educative pur-

[1] Lotze, Microcosmus, I. 458 (English translation).

pose; but if we name it "the divine Idea as it exists on earth," surely the stress must be laid at least equally on the second part of the phrase. We must distinguish, as Plato does, between the pattern laid up in heaven of a perfect commonwealth and any earthly realization of it, marred and defaced by human weakness and passions.

The defect of Hegel's way of stating things is thus that he apparently refuses to recognize any distinction between the process of human experience and what we may call the divine experience — the actuality of the divine life. He recognizes only one process, and one spirit or subject as the bearer of the process, the being that passes through the process. At times, this subject is spoken of as the world-spirit, which is a metaphorical expression like the Humanity of the Comtists, gathering up into unity innumerable finite individualities; but we are plainly intended to identify the world-spirit with the Absolute Being himself, the spirit in all spirits, as Hegel sometimes calls him. Now, obviously, if this identification is pressed, it is tantamount to a denial of any self-centred divine life, — any actuality of God *for himself*, in the Hegelian phrase. There is no knowledge, that is to say, in the universe, no understanding of the scheme of things any-

where, more comprehensive than that which works itself out in laborious patchwork in this and the other human brain. There is no goodness, no justice, no tenderness, save that which springs in the human heart. This is the sense in which Hegel's doctrine was developed by many of his ablest followers, those who are known as the Hegelians of the Left; and such a doctrine differs in no essential particulars from the Religion of Humanity, except that it goes metaphysically a step farther, and identifies humanity with the absolute ground of the universe. And, among English Hegelians at the present day, it is observable that this negative polemic reproduces itself in certain writers, yielding a phase of thought which may not unfairly be described as Hegelian positivism. The doctrine of immortality, or of any world beyond the present, and the idea of any God beyond what it calls "the civilization of Christendom," are especially obnoxious to this phase of thought.

But, to my mind, the deification of humanity has only to be stated in order to condemn itself. When the matter comes to this issue, we have a right to fall back upon the elemental simplicities of thought, — such as we find, for example, in the

Book of Job: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner-stone thereof, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" And it is not only the immensities of space and time and resistless might that raise this pertinent question; it applies no less to the moral qualities in which we recognize the true greatness of our race, — a greatness with which nothing physical can be put in comparison. For the Positivist is right, when he recognizes in the spiritual nobilities of human character the only fitting object of adoration or worship; mere extent, mere power, however vast, have nothing godlike in themselves. "Should the universe," said Pascal in a well-known passage, "conspire to crush him, man would still be nobler than that by which he falls; for he knows that he dies, and of the victory which the universe has over him the universe knows nothing." It is the physical universe which both Pascal and the Positivists have in view, when they oppose to it the conscious life of man; and the Positivists would have us suppose that man, a physical creature, outcome of a physical world, developed, or rather actually created, out of himself the god-

like qualities of justice and mercy and all the varied forms of goodness, crowning himself thus the rightful superior of the godless universe from which he sprang.

I cannot for a moment accept the view of evolution which makes it consist in this cunning manufacture of something out of nothing. Man certainly does develop these moral qualities, and he develops them himself, for only what is self-acquired is a moral acquisition at all. But in his own strength he can do nothing. It is to misread the whole nature of development to suppose that man, as an isolated finite creature, could take a single step in advance. Such a being, supposing it possible for such a being to exist, would remain eternally fixed in a dead sameness of being. What it was, it would remain. Development or progress is not the making of something out of nothing, but the unfolding or manifestation of that which in another aspect eternally is. It is possible, therefore, only to a being who forms part of a divinely guided process, and who draws in consequence from a fount of eternal fulness. Just as it is impossible, therefore, to believe that there is no knowledge in the universe greater than that of man or of beings like him, so it is incredible that there should be no Eternal Goodness, as the source

of those ideals of which we are conscious as the guiding star of all our progress, but which we ourselves so palpably fail to realize.

In justice to Hegel, it is only proper to say that it is precisely his contribution to a true doctrine of evolution which forms one of his most important services to philosophy. Hegelianism has insisted that a development is not an addition of that which was in no sense there before; consequently a developing series can only be understood in the light of its highest term. The true nature of the cause becomes apparent only in the effect. All explanation of the higher by the lower, such as the naturalistic theories attempt, is philosophically a *hysteron proteron*, — a precise inversion of the true account. The antecedents assigned are not the causes of the consequents; for by antecedents the naturalistic theories mean the antecedents (matter and energy for example) *in abstraction from their consequents*, the antecedents taken as they appear in themselves, or as we might suppose them to be if no such consequents had ever issued from them. So conceived, however, the antecedents have no real existence — they are mere *entia rationis* — abstract aspects of the one concrete fact which we call the universe. The true nature of the antecedents is only

learned by reference to the consequents which follow; or, as I put it before, the true nature of the cause becomes apparent only in the effect. All ultimate or philosophical explanation must look to the end. Hence the futility of all attempts to explain human life in terms of the merely animal, to explain life in terms of the inorganic, and ultimately to find a sufficient formula for the cosmic process in terms of the redistribution of matter and motion.

The stress, therefore, which Hegelianism has laid upon the true interpretation of evolution constitutes, as I have said, one of its great claims upon our gratitude in an age when evolution is everywhere in the air, and when the most misleading ideas of its nature are current. The interpretation, it is true, is no new insight on Hegel's part; it is substantially what we find in Aristotle. But inasmuch as Hegel has incorporated it in the very structure of his thinking and given it a powerful modern expression, we rightly connect the doctrine with his name. It is obvious, however, that the line of thought which identifies the divine source and goal of evolution with its highest human manifestations — which believes that the Absolute first arrives at self-consciousness in man, and has no other self-conscious

existence — falls away from the profound Aristotelian view of the *ἐνέργεια*, or completed actuality, as the eternal *prius* of all its evolutionary phases, and falls back upon the naturalistic view according to which the new stage adds to its predecessor something which was not there before at all. The appearance of man becomes then identical with the creation of God; man creates himself, and at the same time brings God to the birth. On such an interpretation, Hegelianism plainly declines upon the level of the purely materialistic theories; and however we may judge of Hegel's own meaning and intention, history shows that this danger is inherent in his method of statement and in the excessive emphasis laid on the doctrine of immanence.[1]

The real explanation of Hegel's sheer identification of the divine existence with the human process is doubtless to be found in the too exclusive intellectualism of his system. Knowledge as such does not force into view the differences between one personality and another. Rather, so far as we merely know, we sink those differ-

[1] It may be added in passing that, even if such a view of evolution were competent to explain the actual stage reached by man in knowledge and morality, it would be quite unable to explain the possibility of progress and the existence of the ideal which guides that progress.

ences, and occupy what is called an objective or impersonal standpoint. If we regard the world simply as a system of thought, as something to be intellectually understood and reproduced, we all place ourselves at the same point of view. We are re-thinking the same thoughts; and it becomes not unnatural to treat the different finite thinkers as reproductions, functions, or modes of one universal self-consciousness. This unification of consciousness in a single Self is sometimes carried so far that to speak of self-consciousness or mind in the plural is branded as an apostasy from the only true philosophic faith.

But any plausibility which this point of view may possess within the realm of pure intellect vanishes at once as soon as we turn to the moral sphere; we are not merely contemplative intellects, we are, above all, agents or doers. It is well, as Hegel does, to insist on the *rational* character of the universe, but to make Thought the exclusive principle is either to fall into a one-sided extreme or to use "thought" in a non-natural sense. Thought cannot fairly be made to include will, and any theory of the universe which neglects the fact of will omits that which seems to communicate a living reality to the whole. A system which, like Hegel's, lays ex-

clusive stress on thought is always in danger of reducing the universe to a phantasm of the intellect, — an impersonal system of thought-harmony, — or, in Mr. Bradley's vivid phrase, "an unearthly ballet of bloodless categories." It is in the will, in purposive action, and particularly in our moral activity, as Fichte, to my mind, conclusively demonstrated, that we lay hold upon reality. All that we know might be but a dream-procession of shadows, and the mind of the dreamer no more than the still mirror in which they are reflected, if indeed it were anything but the shifting shadows themselves. But in the purposive "I will," each man is real, and is immediately conscious of his own reality. Whatever else may or may not be real, this is real. This is the fundamental belief, around which scepticism may weave its maze of doubts and logical puzzles, but from which it is eventually powerless to dislodge us, because no argument can affect an immediate certainty, — a certainty, moreover, on which our whole view of the universe depends.

Now the individuality or self-hood of which we are conscious in willing, is felt as one which implies a real difference not only between me and any other finite self, but also a real difference or dual-

ism between me and the absolute spirit. I exist in God. "The human soul," as has been said, "is neither self-derived nor self-existing. It would vanish if it had not a substance, and its substance is God."[1] God is the fountain light of all our day, the master light of all our seeing, inasmuch as we share in the common or universal reason; and his are the ideals which illuminate and guide our life. But in our wills we feel a principle of self-hood, which separates us even from the Being who is the ground of our existence. This is most manifest in the sphere of moral duty. "Our wills are ours to make them Thine," as the poet finely puts it. But they must be really ours, if there is to be any ethical value in the surrender, — if there is even to be any meaning in the process at all. If there are not two wills involved, then no relation between them is possible, and the imaginary duality is an illusion incident to our limited point of view. But the ethical consciousness places its veto once for all upon any such sophistication of its primary and absolute deliverance; and by that absolute deliverance, we shall do well, I think, to stand. The speculative reason sees no alternative between absolute dependence, which would make

[1] Lord Gifford, quoted by Professor Upton, Hibbert Lectures, p. 284.

us merely the pipes upon which the divine musician plays, and absolute independence, which would make the world consist of a plurality of self-subsistent real beings. These are the only kinds of relation which it finds intelligible. But it seems to me that it must be, in the nature of the case, impossible for the finite spirit to understand the mode of its relation to the infinite or absolute Spirit in which it lives. That relation could only be intelligible from the absolute point of view. The fact, then, that we cannot reconcile the partial independence and freedom of the finite self with its acknowledged dependence upon God in other respects, need not force us to abandon our primary moral conviction, in deference to a speculative theory which may be applying a finite plumb-line to measure the resources of the infinite. After all, why should the creation of beings with a real, though partial, freedom and independence be *an absolute impossibility?* It is certainly the only view which makes the world a real place, — which makes the whole labor of history more than a shadow fight or aimless phantasmagoria.

I have dwelt, in the foregoing, upon the inadequacy of any theory which pushes the doctrine

of immanence to the extreme of absolutely identifying the finite and the human process. Let me exemplify, by a recent instance, a counter error into which it is easy to fall. The first danger we found historically exemplified in the Hegelian system, or at least in important developments of Hegelian thought. Mr. Bradley's recent work on "Appearance and Reality" may be regarded, in many respects, as an attempt to supplement and correct the defects of the Hegelian statement; and as it is without doubt the most important metaphysical work which has appeared in England for a considerable time, I make no apology for using it in illustration of the next part of my argument.

Mr. Bradley has always protested against the reduction of the life of the world to a set of logical categories; and in this volume he recalls his fellow Hegelians from a too narrow humanism to an insight into the vastness of the sustaining Life that operates unspent throughout the universe. The whole book is a praiseworthy attempt to treat the life of the Absolute for itself as a reality, as the most real of realities. The truth on which he insists may seem tolerably elementary; the strange thing would rather seem to be that man should ever forget his

position as a finite incident in the plan of things, and measure himself with the unmeasurable Spirit of the universe. Is it not both absurd and blasphemous to suppose that the Power which cradles and encompasses all our lives is not itself a living fact, and that it is reserved for man to bring the Absolute, as it were, to the birth? True as it is, in the proper reference, to say that the Absolute realizes itself in human self-consciousness, the statement becomes fundamentally absurd, if it is taken to mean that the Absolute exists, so to speak, by the grace of man, and lives only in the breath of his nostrils. But the most elementary truths are sometimes most easily forgotten in the heat of polemic against some particular error. And therefore the stress which Mr. Bradley lays throughout his volume upon the necessarily superhuman character of the Absolute — its inexpressible and incomprehensible transcendence of human conditions of being and thinking — constitutes a salutary corrective to a good deal of current speculation. But Mr. Bradley has not been content simply to restore to us this fundamental insight. He offers us himself a constructive theory of absolute experience — in vague outline, as he often admits, but still a constructive theory in

pretty definite terms. And the reason why I call attention to this theory is that it illustrates so effectively the counter-error against which we must guard in forming our conception of the divine nature, — the pantheism or akosmism which reduces all finite experience to a species of illusion.

This goal is indicated already in the title of the book "Appearance and Reality"; for "reality" is restricted to the life of the Absolute for itself, and all the world of our knowledge and experience is described as "appearance,"— branded, indeed, as "mere appearance," "irrational," "self-contradictory" appearance, not to mention other depreciatory adjectives and terms of excommunication. According to Mr. Bradley, knowledge, inasmuch as it is relational throughout, is defective as such; it makes distinctions (it distinguishes qualities, for example, in a thing) but it never reduces its distinctions to a real unity. The very relation of subject and object, which must exist in every instance of knowledge, implies a difference not overcome. But in the Absolute all differences must be overcome, perfect unity must be realized; there must be what is called an "all-pervasive transfusion." Now, the only hint we have of such a state, according to Mr.

Bradley, is in pure feeling — the diffused sense of being, out of which our conscious life seems continually to emerge. The first dawn of active consciousness introduces the distinctions of knowledge into this characterless unity. Indeed, Mr. Bradley admits that we hardly possess this state of mere feeling "as more than that which we are in the act of losing." I would go farther and say more definitely that it is a state which we *never* actually realize, though we seem at times to approximate to it, and conceive it as being approached asymptotically in the lowest forms of organic life. Such asymptotic approach consists simply in dropping one by one the distinctions of our own conscious existence. Consequently, the state is describable only by negatives, and its realization would mean a lapse into unconsciousness altogether.

Be that as it may, in the meantime, this is the analogy which Mr. Bradley uses throughout, in his attempt to construct or body forth the experience of the Absolute. It must be a higher experience in which thought shall, as it were, return to the immediacy of feeling. "We can form the general idea," he says, "of an absolute intuition *in which phenomenal distinctions are merged,* a whole become immediate at a

higher stage without losing any richness . . . a total experience where will and thought and feeling may all once more be one." But though Mr. Bradley is constantly saying that no richness is lost, that all the distinctions are somehow retained and preserved, it is nothing more than *saying*. His own logic, which stumbles persistently over the fact of difference and relation, and his own analogy of the distinctionless life of feeling, carry him irresistibly to a Brahmanic pantheism, in which all finite existence simply disappears as an unreal dream. He runs riot in metaphors to describe the consummation of finite appearance in the Absolute; and the nature of these metaphors is of itself sufficiently instructive. Appearances are said to be "merged," "fused," "blended," "absorbed," "run together," "embraced and harmonized," "dissolved in a higher unity," "transformed," above all, "transmuted." "Transmuted" is the blessed word from which Mr. Bradley seems to derive most comfort. But for "transmuted" we find at times the sinister synonyms "suppressed," "dissolved," "lost." In one place "transmuted" and "destroyed" are expressly coupled, while in another we are told that the "process of correction," which finite existence undergoes in the Absolute may

"entirely dissipate its nature." In this fashion, the finite self-consciousness, among other things, is to be embraced and harmonized by being "transmuted and suppressed as such." Or, as he puts it elsewhere with audacious irony, "the individual never can in himself become a harmonious system. In the complete gift and dissipation of his personality, HE, as such, must vanish." A gift of personality which is at the same time the dissipation of the personality in question, a harmonizing which means disappearance, recall too forcibly the Roman method of pacification, — they make a desert and they call it peace.

In fact there can be no doubt that Mr. Bradley's speculation, with its repudiation of the form of knowledge as such, on the ground of the difference and relation which it involves, leads, not to any higher or larger unity, but to the pit of undifferentiated substance, out of which Hegel took so much pains to dig philosophy. The greater part of Mr. Bradley's book seems to me to reproduce in essence, and often almost in expression, the Spinozistic doctrine of Imagination, which makes finite existence a species of illusion. No doubt there were two tendencies at strife in Spinoza, too; but his dominant thought is that "all determination is

negation," and so is not truly real. Hence all determinations vanish, like clouds before the sun, in the viewless unity of the *unica substantia.* But if finite existence is illusory, and its distinctions simply disappear, then of necessity the unity which we reach by the denial of these distinctions is quite characterless. We have illusion on the one side, and, as the counter stroke, nonentity on the other. For does not Scotus Erigena tell us, at the end of a similar line of thought, "*Deus propter excellentiam non immerito nihil vocatur*"?

The mention of Erigena suggests the extent to which this mode of reasoning has prevailed. Although it is chiefly associated in modern philosophy with Spinozism and the doctrine of undifferentiated substance, as the most typical example of the tendency, it dominates not only the Brahmanic speculation of the East, but, from Philo downwards, has formed a constant element in the religious philosophy of the West. Neo-Platonism culminates in the doctrine of the absolutely transcendent One, "beyond" both the sensuous and the intellectual world, elevated above all thought, all being, all goodness, neither conscious, therefore, nor active; nameless, and without any quality whatsoever. So Plotinus

reasoned, while his followers endeavored to scale a still giddier height in refusing even to designate the ineffable as "One." Iamblichus and Proclus superimposed upon the One of Plotinus a still higher, completely ineffable, principle. The Neo-Platonic philosophy had a powerful influence upon Christian thought. It was revived in the great system of Erigena at the beginning of the ninth century, and it is the underlying thought of all speculative mysticism. Under the name of "negative theology," it has continually reappeared in the higher walks of theological philosophy; perhaps its most recent and noteworthy reappearance being made in Dean Mansel's celebrated Bampton Lectures, which employ the weapons of agnosticism in defence of the churchly faith. I may be able, perhaps, before I close, to indicate what seems to me the truth which this negative theology inaptly expresses. But taken as it stands, and as it states itself, it produces the effect of a dangerous falsehood. Striving to exalt the Divine into a region beyond thought and beyond expression, it leaves us with nothing in our grasp at all. The Absolute Being becomes a mere abstraction or, like Shelley's Demogorgon, "a mighty Darkness filling the seat of power."

This is well exemplified in the conclusions to which Mr. Bradley is driven. Morality, he says, cannot, as such, be ascribed to the Absolute. Goodness, as such, is but appearance, and is transcended in the Absolute. Will cannot belong, as such, to the Absolute. In the Absolute even thought must "lose and transcend its proper self." If the term "personal," he says again, is to bear anything like its ordinary sense, then assuredly the Absolute is not merely personal. "The Absolute," he says roundly, "is not personal, nor is it moral, nor is it beautiful or true."

What is the inevitable effect upon the mind of this cluster of negations? Surely it will be this: Either the Absolute will be regarded as a mere Unknowable, with which we have no concern; or the denial of will, intellect, morality, personality, beauty, and truth, will be taken to mean that the Absolute is a unity indifferent to these higher aspects of experience. It will be regarded as non-moral and impersonal, in the sense of being *below* these distinctions; and our Absolute will then remarkably resemble the soulless matter of the materialist. Nothing, indeed, is more certain than that extremes meet in this fashion, and that the attempt to reach the super-

human falls back into the infra-human. Of course Mr. Bradley *intended* his unity to be a higher and not a lower unity. "The Absolute," he says in one place, "is not personal, because it is personal and more. It is, in a word, super-personal." And as if aware of the danger that lurks in his denials, he even warns us that, if there is a risk of falling back upon the lower unity, it is better to affirm personality than to call the Absolute impersonal. But there is more than a risk; I maintain there is an absolute certainty that this will be the end.

Hence the somewhat unexpected result of Mr. Bradley's attempt to transcend experience and to determine the Absolute as such — its nature and mode of existence for itself — is to throw into relief the strong points of the Hegelian scheme. The negative results of Mr. Bradley's search are an involuntary confirmation of Hegel's wisdom in refusing to step beyond the circle of knowledge and the process of history. We have seen that Hegel's theory is indefensible, so far as it equates the Absolute with human experience. But the theory is false only so far as it proposes to confine the spirit of the Universe to these earthly tabernacles. So understood, I have urged that it cabins the spirit of man within a narrow

and self-sufficient positivism. It undermines the sentiment of reverence, and dulls our sense of the infinite greatness and the infinite mystery of the world. But it is profoundly true, so far as it asserts that only by predicates drawn from human experience can we determine the Absolute at all, and that, moreover, such determination is substantially and practically, though doubtless not literally, true.

For here is the core of truth that gives vitality to "negative theology," and ensures its constant re-appearance. The nature of the existence which the Absolute enjoys for itself is, and must be, incomprehensible save by the Absolute itself. We cannot construct the Divine life even in vague generality, and that for the simplest of all reasons, — we are men, and not God. Mr. Bradley's discussion seems to me to prove afresh that the attempt metaphysically, scientifically, or literally,[1] to determine the Absolute as such is necessarily barren. Where the definition is not a mere tautology, it is a complex of negatives, and if not technically untrue, it has in its suggestions the effects of an untruth. Our statements about the Absolute are actually nearer the truth where they give up the pretence of literal exactitude,

[1] I use these here for the moment as equivalent terms.

and speak in terms of morality and religion, applying to it the characteristics of our highest experience. Such language recognizes itself in general (or at least it certainly should recognize itself) as possessing only symbolical truth, — as being in fact "thrown out," as Matthew Arnold used to say, at a vast reality. But both religion and the higher poetry — just because they give up the pretence of an impossible exactitude — carry us, I cannot doubt, nearer to the meaning of the world than the formulæ of an abstract metaphysics.

Such a conclusion may be decried in turn as agnostic, but names need frighten no one. The agnosticism which rests on the idea of an unknowable thing-in-itself — the agnosticism which many of Kant's and Spencer's arguments would establish — is certainly baseless. But there are regions of speculation where agnosticism is the only healthy attitude. Such a region I hold to be that of the Absolute as such. But because the Absolute in this sense cannot be compassed by the finite mind, it by no means follows that such an all-embracing experience is not a reality; on the contrary, the denial of such a possibility would seem to be more than presumptuous. And, again, the ineffable transcendence of the Absolute

must not be construed to mean that our experience is a vain show, which throws no light on the real nature of things. Rightly agnostic though we are regarding the nature of the Absolute as such, no shadow of doubt need fall on the truth of our experience as a true revelation of the Absolute for us. Hegel was right in seeking the Absolute within experience, and finding it too; for certainly we can neither seek it nor find it anywhere else. The truth about the Absolute which we extract from our experience is hardly likely to be the final truth; it may be taken up and superseded in a wider or fuller truth. And in this way we might pass, in successive cycles of finite existence, from sphere to sphere of experience, from orb to orb of truth; and even the highest would still remain a finite truth, and fall infinitely short of the truth of God. But such a doctrine of relativity in no way invalidates the truth of the revelation at any given stage. The fact that the truth I reach is the truth for me, does not make it, on that account, less true. It is true so far as it goes, and if my experience can carry me no further, I am justified in treating it as ultimate *until it is superseded.* Should it ever be superseded, I shall then see both how it is modified by being comprehended in a higher

truth, and also how it and no other statement of the truth could have been true at my former standpoint. But *before* that higher standpoint is reached, to seek to discredit our present insight by the general reflection that its truth is partial and requires correction, is a perfectly empty truth, which, in its bearing upon human life, must almost certainly have the effect of an untruth.

We do well, therefore, to take human experience, not indeed as itself the Absolute bodily, but as constituting the only accessible and authentic revelation of its nature to us. And, in the interpretation of experience, our most essential help is to be found in a true theory of evolution; for the divine must be held to be most fully, and adequately revealed in the highest aspects of our experience. If, again, we are asked how we distinguish between what is higher and lower, it is clear that no formal or merely intellectual test, such as "growing complexity of detail harmonized within a single whole," will suffice. This may be a characteristic of the higher stages, but clearly the realization of an abstract formula like this possesses in itself no interest or value. It is the content of any experience which makes it higher in any vital sense, and makes it of decisive

importance as throwing light on the meaning of experience as a whole. And in any such estimate we must ultimately rest our whole case on an absolute judgment of value. Man, says Kant, is, in his typically rational activities, an End-in-himself. The life, that is to say, which is guided by the ideals of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and which partially realizes these, possesses an absolute and indefeasible worth. Such a judgment represents a conviction so deep that we are prepared to stake everything upon it. Strictly speaking, such a conviction is not the result of argument, or a deduction from any philosophic system. It might rather be spoken of as an assumption, the fundamental assumption upon which all subsequent philosophizing must depend. Without this assumption of the infinite value and significance of human life, argument about God is simply waste of time. The man who does not start from this assumption — the man who can embrace the opposite alternative — is not accessible to any argument. For him the world has no serious meaning, and he himself has no serious function to discharge in it. He has denied his calling, or, as Fichte puts it, he has elected to be a thing and not a person. Of such an one it can only be said, He is joined to

his idols, let him alone. Faith in God can only rest securely on the basal certainty of duty, and the view of human destiny and the universal purpose that springs therefrom. This faith in the divine significance of life has never perhaps been more nobly expressed than it is by Wordsworth in the sonnet with which he closes his sonnet-series on the River Duddon, and I do not think that these lectures could be concluded in any more fitting words: —

"I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away. — Vain sympathies!
For backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the Stream, and shall forever glide;
The Form remains, the Function never dies;
While we, the brave, the mighty and the wise,
We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish; — be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands has power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know."

v 5

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